M E R R T
Public Information Officer

INTRODUCTION

This module provides information about the role of the Public Information Officer (PIO) during transportation incidents involving radioactive material. This module discusses public concerns and perceptions concerning radioactive material incidents and identifies basic statements that should be delivered to the media and the general public during these incidents. This module also identifies emergency public information sources available to support an incident response and agencies that require public information coordination during a transportation incident response.

As a Public Information Officer who may respond to a transportation incident involving radioactive material, you should have a general knowledge of radioactive material. You should also be aware of public concerns and perceptions regarding transportation incidents involving radioactive material. You should recognize a potential need for multiple PIOs to support the agencies involved in a response and the need to coordinate all public and media information through the Incident Commander and the Incident Commander's designated PIO.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this module is to provide the Public Information Officer (PIO) with the necessary information to successfully communicate to the public the events and outcomes of the incident. You may not necessarily be an expert in radiological principles so this module will inform you of the basic concepts, enabling you to more effectively communicate necessary information to the media and public, ensuring they are adequately and correctly informed during a transportation incident involving radioactive material.

MODULE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this module, you will be able to:

1. Identify public concerns and perceptions about incidents involving radioactive material.
2. Identify basic messages that should be delivered to the media and the general public during a transportation incident involving radioactive material.
3. Identify emergency public information sources available to support an incident response.
4. Identify agencies that will require public information coordination during a response to an incident involving radioactive material.

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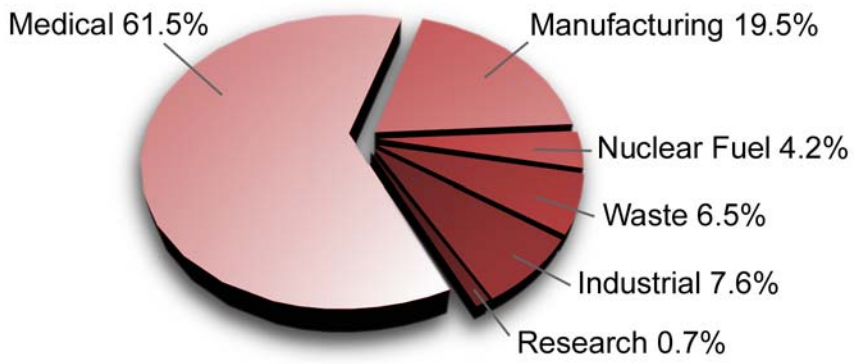
RISK PERCEPTION

Public reaction to incidents involving the transportation of radioactive material is often more extreme than to incidents involving other types of hazardous material. A lack of technical knowledge on the part of the public and the media may lead to a public response that is based on mistaken perceptions.

Fear of the unknown is a factor that may cause overreaction to any event involving radiation. Many hold the mistaken belief that any incident involving radioactive material is more dangerous than one involving another type of hazardous material. Regardless, it is important to understand that the public will be concerned about transportation incidents involving radiological material. The Public Information Officer (PIO) must be prepared to deal with and address public concerns.

In the United States, radioactive materials have been shipped for more than 50 years. Like other kinds of shipments, radioactive materials in transit have been involved in accidents or incidents. In most cases, there was no release of any radioactive material into the environment. When releases have occurred, the material has been cleaned up with no identifiable harm to people or to the environment. No one has ever been killed or seriously injured in an accident involving radioactive material as a result of the radioactive nature of the cargo.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) estimates that approximately 500 billion packages of all commodities are transported each year in the U.S. About 100 million of these packages are hazardous material. Of these, approximately 2.8 million contain radioactive material. The following chart illustrates the types of radioactive material shipments being transported over U.S. highways by the U.S. Department of Energy and other shippers.



According to a Department of Transportation database that tracks accident information[1], between January 1991 and December 2000 there were 139,690 transportation-related incidents involving hazardous material. Of these incidents, only 148 (0.001%) involved radioactive material. This information shows that the number of transportation incidents involving radioactive material is much smaller than their 2% to 7% share of the shipments.

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[1] Hazardous Materials Incident data and summary statistics provided from the Hazardous Materials Incident Report Form 5800.1. Summary statistics may be viewed at http://hazmat.dot.gov/files/hazmat/10year/10yearfrm.htm.

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On-Scene Responsibilities of the PIO

Upon arriving at the scene of an incident involving radioactive material, the PIO should:

- Report to the Incident Commander (IC) at the field command post and obtain a briefing.
- Work with law enforcement to establish a media area. This should be away from the IC and the command post.
- Inform the media that all information at the scene will be coordinated through the PIO. Point out areas that have been designated as media areas.
- Prepare an initial information summary.
- Determine if other agencies have assigned PIOs and ensure that you coordinate with these individuals. The IC should release all information about the incident through the designated PIO.
- Obtain approval from the IC before releasing any information.
- Focus on two or three key messages. These messages should include the risk posed by the incident (including no risk) and the actions taken in response to the incident. Even if no one specifically asks, these are points that should be emphasized by the PIO and other responders who might have an occasion to meet with the media.
- Do not speculate. Stick to the facts. Give short concise answers. Avoid jargon.
- If there are any deaths or injuries, do not release the names of victims before their families have been notified.
- Be truthful and factual. False information will eliminate your credibility with the media and the public.
- Ensure that any information released is complete, accurate, timely, and credible.

PRE-PLANNED KEY MESSAGES

Pre-planned messages for the early stages of an incident may be useful. There are certain elements of radioactive material transportation that the PIO needs to understand. These include:

- Radioactive material is required to be transported in packaging that is intended to limit the risk to the public and the environment in the event of an accident
- The greater the risk from radiation, the stronger the packaging
- Packaging used to transport high level radioactive material is designed to withstand serious accident conditions that may occur during transportation without releasing their contents
- Radiation is easy to detect and quantify

EVENT SCENE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The IC is the best and primary source of information at the incident scene. Other than the IC, the best sources for information at the scene of an incident involving radioactive material are on-scene personnel. It is best to obtain quotable information from "believable" sources. According to risk communication studies[2], "believable" sources include the following agencies in the order given:

1. Emergency medical personnel
2. Fire department
3. State police department
4. Local police department
5. State environmental or health agency

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[2]**JENKINS-SMITH, HANK, AND CAROL SILVA.** How Entrenched is Public Opposition to Nuclear Materials Transport Programs?: The Case of the CS-137 Transportation Program. University of New Mexico Institute for Public Policy, 1995.

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COORDINATING INFORMATION

Many agencies can become involved during transportation incidents involving radioactive material. These include local, state, tribal, and federal agencies. The on-scene PIO needs to work with other PIOs, whether they are at the scene or not, to ensure common understanding of the event and to coordinate information released to the media and public. This will reduce the chance of distributing incorrect, incomplete, or conflicting information. Agencies that may have a PIO at the event scene or at another location include:

- Fire and police departments
- Emergency management agency
- Mayor's office
- State agencies
- Governor's office
- DOE Radiological Assistance Program Team

If an incident requires more coordination of media or public information than can be handled at the event scene, a Joint Information Center (JIC) may be established. A JIC is usually a pre-designated location where agency PIOs and PIO staff gather to coordinate and distribute information about the incident. The JIC typically has sufficient telephones and communication capabilities to meet both the needs of the PIOs and the media. The JIC also provides a location where public concern calls can be received and addressed.

Press releases concerning the incident should not be distributed without approval from or concurrence of the event scene Incident Commander.

Public and Media Communications

Larger incidents often lead to increased public interest and more inquiries of emergency officials. If the volume of calls is small, they should be handled by the PIO. If an event receives a large amount of public inquiry or if concern is high, the risk of spreading misinformation becomes greater. To reduce this potential, trained personnel may be needed to staff phones in the JIC or a local emergency operations center to ensure the public is receiving accurate information.

This section of the JIC consists of individuals who can field calls from the public about the incident. Personnel staffing the phones are given important information as it becomes available, so that current information can be given to callers. It is wise to prepare a "Fact Sheet" for staff members to follow. The fact sheet should be based on the PIOs initial questions to the IC and should answer the traditional Who, What, Where, When, and Why questions.

Available Resources

Each state has its own approach to determining who is in charge of a response to an incident involving radioactive material. The IC might be the local fire chief, the state police chief, or another specially trained individual. If possible, you should learn the identity of likely ICs before an incident occurs.

Once potential ICs are identified, you should identify information office procedures that might already be in place. Are there written PIO procedures? Does the information office notification list include you?

State Resources

In addition to technical information resources, the PIO can obtain assistance from other agencies in developing and distributing public information. The state may have one agency designated as the point-of-contact for public information, or each state agency responsible for initiating an emergency response may maintain a public information office capability.

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Federal Resources

If the incident is significant enough to warrant activation of a lead federal agency, that agency will normally have a PIO available on-scene or via telephone. The following table provides additional information on these lead federal agencies:

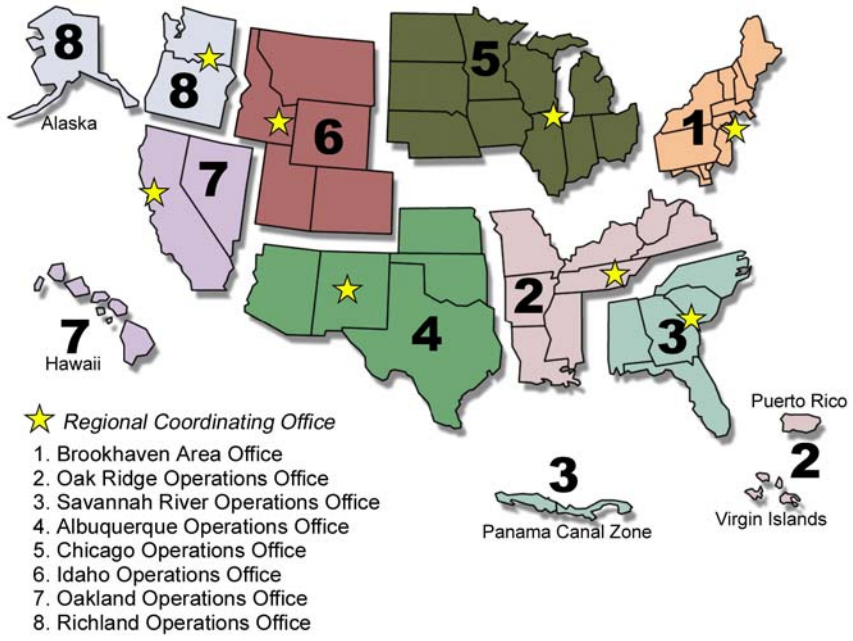
LEAD FEDERAL AGENCY	RESPONSIBILITY
Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)	Shipment of radioactive material licensed by the NRC or an agreement state
Department of Defense (DOD) or Department of Energy (DOE)	Radioactive material shipped by or for DOD or DOE
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Shipments of radioactive material not licensed or owned by a federal agency or an agreement state

U. S. Department of Energy

There are several U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) resources available to assist PIOs during a transportation incident involving radioactive material. The most likely source of assistance for local and state responders is the DOE Radiological Assistance Program (RAP).

DOE RAP teams will respond to incidents involving DOE radioactive material. If requested, DOE RAP teams will also provide specialized emergency response assistance to other federal departments and agencies, state, tribal and local governments, private industry, and private individuals. DOE radiological assistance is normally requested through the state or tribal governments. The DOE RAP team will include a PIO.

Eight Regional Coordinating Offices are available to respond to requests for radiological assistance within their regions. These regions are shown on the following map:



Region	Regional Coordinating Office	Location	24-Hour Number
1	Brookhaven Area Office	Upton, L.I. NY	(631) 344-2200
2	Oak Ridge Operations Office	Oak Ridge, TN	(865) 576-1005
3	Savannah River Operations Office	Aiken, SC	(803) 725-3333
4	Albuquerque Operations Office	Albuquerque, NM	(505) 845-4667
5	Chicago Operations Office	Argonne, IL	(630) 252-4800
6	Idaho Operations Office	Idaho Falls, ID	(208) 526-1515
7	Oakland Operations Office	Oakland, CA	(925) 422-8951
8	Richland Operations Office	Richland, WA	(509) 373-3800
HQ	DOE Headquarters EOC	Washington, DC	(202) 586-8100

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Additional DOE public information assistance is available through DOE's Regional Field or Operations offices. The Department also maintains a Public and Congressional Affairs Office at its headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Transportation emergency preparedness material, available through the DOE, includes training material, fact sheets, and booklets. This material is available through DOE Regional Coordinating Offices and can help you provide the public and the media with facts about radioactive material. Much of this information is also available on the Department of Energy's web site at http://www.ntp.doe.gov.

Check Your Understanding

1. Public reaction to incidents involving radioactive material is often more extreme than incidents involving other types of hazardous material. True/False.

2. The public perception of radioactive material is one of confidence and support. True/False.

3. Radioactive material is required to be transported in packaging that is intended to limit the risk to the public and the environment in the event of an accident. True/False.

4. The greater the risk from radiation, the _____ the packaging.

5. The _____ _____ is the best and primary source of information at the scene of an incident involving radioactive material.

6. Press releases concerning the incident should NOT be distributed without approval from the event scene _____ _____.

7. Which agency is most believable as far as the public is concerned?
   a. State police
   b. Emergency medical personnel
   c. State EPA
   d. Federal PIO

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ANSWERS

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. stronger
5. Incident Commander
6. Incident Commander
7. b